

Geotourism MapGuide Helps Travelers Find Points of Interest in Indian Country in Eco-Friendly way

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It's fun to discover new destinations on your own, bump into a great little café or discover a hiking trail that's off the beaten path. But sometimes it's better to be pointed directly to a destination's best attractions by the folks who know the area best: The people who live there.

That's the concept behind The Sierra Nevada Geotourism MapGuide, an interactive website and print map that highlights the history and points of interest in the Sierra Nevada region. Visitors to the website will find more than 1,200 free write-ups and photos from locals on the best places to eat, hike, explore, shop, relax and simply enjoy the beauty of the Sierra Nevada landscape.

The Geotourism Guide is a collaborative effort between the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, Sierra Business Council, the National Geographic Society and a very long list of regional partners, including the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

With the help of the BIA, this website features a number of American Indian points of interest. Simply type "Native American" in the "Search Box," and a map instantly pops up, peppered with destinations that offer a Native angle, stretching from the Oregon border to south of Bakersfield, California.

Nicole DeJonghe, senior program director for the Sierra Business Council, says they welcome the participation of all tribes. "We want to respect their needs and desires, and in order to do that, we need to hear from them. We invite them into the conversation."

Right now, DeJonghe says they are working with the Washoe Tribe and the Intertribal Council to drive and direct tourism to specific points of interest. “We have been very careful to work with Native Americans so they can guide us regarding what they’d like to see included in the mapguide, versus what is sensitive and what they don’t want published.”

What is “Geotourism?”

Many of the world’s greatest destinations are being battered, year after year, by an explosion of tourists, who tromp all over the natural character of a place and don’t show much regard for its preservation.

It’s that deeply held concern out of which “Geotourism” was born — an emerging philosophy about traveling and seeing the world that speaks to the heart of Native Americans and their sacred relationship with the land and culture.

Specifically, geotourism is defined as, “Tourism that sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place — its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage, and the well-being of its residents.”

In order for geotourism to provide a rich experience for the traveler, it relies on the synergistic cooperation between visitors, residents and the community.